

CABLES IN SPY TRIAL CALLED NONSENSITIVE

A State Department Expert Says
Information Allegedly Wired to
Vietnam Caused Little Harm

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ALEXANDRIA, Va., May 4—A State Department expert on Southeast Asia found last year that there was "little of a sensitive nature in the documents" allegedly transmitted to Vietnam by two alleged spies.

The expert further concluded that the damage caused by the documents falling into the hands of Vietnamese officials in Paris "was light."

The findings about the relative importance of the State Department cables became known today when excerpts from a State Department damage assessment report were read into the record of the espionage trial of David Truong, a part-time graduate student, and Ronald L. Humphrey, an official in the United States Information Agency.

According to another document that was quoted by a defense lawyer in the trial today, the lack of importance placed on the documents by the original "damage assessment memorandum" prompted the Federal Bureau of Investigation to complain to the State Department that the assessment "would give the prosecutors trouble."

Apparently partly as a result of this complaint by Donald W. Marsland, the supervising F.B.I. official in charge of the espionage investigation, a second and then a third damage assessment memorandum were prepared. The conclusions of the later assessments have not been made known.

Most Serious Charge

The first State Department assessment is important because it brings into question the most serious charge against Mr. Humphrey and Mr. Truong: that they delivered national defense information to Vietnam.

In testimony yesterday, a series of F.B.I. agents who worked on the case testified that none of the cables that were secretly and temporarily intercepted by the Government on their way to Paris contained any technical information about satellites, troop movements or weapons.

The State Department assessment that there was little sensitive material in the cables was written by James Rosenthal, then the chief analyst for the Department's Southeast Asian desk.

The assessment became known when Mark W. Foster, one of the defense lawyers, quoted the conclusions of the first assessment and asked Mr. Marsland, the F.B.I. supervisor, if he was aware of the study.

"Yes, I think that was something like his original assessment," Mr. Marsland replied.

Mr. Foster then asked Mr. Marsland whether he had complained to an official in the State Department that the kind of language used by Mr. Rosenthal "would give the prosecutors trouble."

'Assessment Not Consistent'

Mr. Marsland said that he did not recall making such a statement. "I felt the assessment was not consistent with the kind of protest we were getting from the State Department on this penetration," he said. "It was not consistent with Mr. Christopher's assessment."

Mr. Marsland was almost certainly referring to Warren Christopher, the Deputy Secretary of State. In a preliminary hearing on March 20, Attorney General Griffin B. Bell said that he had become aware of the espionage case on May 6, 1977, when Mr. Christopher told him that the United States was confronted with a "grave" problem because "the security of the State Department had been compromised and penetrated."

Mr. Bell further quoted Mr. Christopher as saying that "someone's taking very important documents, classified documents, out of the State Department."

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